THE NATION'S PRIVILEGES, AND THEIR PRESERVATION.

A

SERMON

PREACHED ON THE DAY OF

OUR NATIONAL ANNIVERSARY,

1852,

IN CHRIST CHURCH,

ALEXANDRIA, VA.

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Gentlemen:

Your unanimous and unexpected request, kindly conveyed to me by your Rector, for a copy for publication of the Discourse preached in your church on the 4th inst., is hereby complied with. I can only say, I wish it were more worthy of your approbation.

I remain, very respectfully,

Your friend and obedient servant,

WILLIAM SPARROW.

To the Vestry of Christ Church,
Alexandria, Va.

THE NATION'S PRIVILEGES,

AND THEIR

PRESERVATION.

DEUTERONOMY IV. 7:

"WHAT NATION IS THERE SO GREAT, WHO HATH GOD SO NIGH UNTO THEM, AS THE LORD OUR GOD IS IN ALL THINGS THAT WE CALL UPON HIM FOR?"

OF national greatness, even in the lowest and most secular sense of the term, the Jewish people largely partook. Look at the date of their origin, so far back in antiquity that most of the nations now existing are but upstarts compared with them. Look at the respectability of that origin itself: they sprang not from some adventurer or pirate, but from an eastern emir of distinguished worth and dignity. Look at their enviable position in the centre of ancient civilization, and on the great highway of ancient intercourse. Look at their history, in the lowest and most rationalistic view of it, how wonderful, how diversified; exhibiting a firmness of character in the people, and a recuperative power after great disasters, entirely unequalled. Look at their bondage in the infancy of their national existence; their escape from this thraldom; their wanderings till they made a settlement in Canaan; their varied fortunes there, from the greatest prosperity and most extensive sway, to a state verging on extinction; the attention

they often attracted from the greatest powers of the earth; and the relation in which they often stood to them; and lastly, their final overthrow and dispersion, more fearful than ever befell any other people, and yet in no way touching their existence as a race; except it be to make it prominent, imparting to them an unmatched singularity on the pages of human record. As was the bush on Horeb, burning but not consumed, in the eyes of Moses, so are the Jews, this moment, in the eyes of all the world; and if they do not attract a due degree of attention from a certain class of reading and thinking persons among us, it is to be ascribed only to the spiritual aspect and connections of their history.

This leads to the further observation, that the great peculiarity of this people is, that their history, though also secular, is chiefly, and in its primary aspect, religious, and themselves, though a secular, yet also a sacred nation. Their chief interest for a serious mind arises from their peculiar relations to the true and living God, at a time when most of the world was polytheistic and idolatrous; and from their peculiar position still as the people of that God; though for the present under his heavy frown. It is in this aspect they are presented to us in the text. Here Moses makes their greatness and glory to consist in this, that God is in the midst of them as their lawgiver, ruler, and protector; that Jehovah has covenanted to hear their prayers and answer their requests. He sees little in the history of his people—and what I say of Moses may be said of all the prophets and apostles of the Bible—they see little in Jewish history as civil history, compared with its religious character. Their unanimous testimony is, that the true greatness of Israel lies in the divine interpositions in their behalf, and that this greatness depends upon their recognition

of Jehovah as its author. How often were they cast down, and how often lifted up again! What critical situations have they been placed in, and how uniform and wonderful their deliverance! A more checkered lot than theirs is hardly conceivable; none on the records of the world is comparable to it, in this as in various other respects. And why were they so often brought low? Was it not always in consequence of their unfaithfulness to Jehovah as their king? And when they were rescued and restored to prosperity, do we not always find it was because they acknowledged their error and again sought after God? And their present very peculiar condition, as not enjoying the divine favor, and yet not utterly cast off—are we not warranted in saying it arises from this, that while they have in heart revolted against God, and have rejected the Messiah who was sent to them, they have not denied Jehovah's right to rule over them, nay, fondly cling to the persuasion that he is still the God of Israel, and indulge the hope, though vain, of a Messiah yet to come? Had they abandoned the pure theism by which they have been distinguished for thousands of years among the nations, or had they as a body rejected as unworthy of confidence the promise of a Saviour's advent; there can be little doubt they would long since have shared the fate of all other nations subjected to expatriation and dispersion, and have become absorbed and lost in the population around them.

The Jews, then, we conclude, were a most signally favored people, and to them were most strictly applicable the words of our text. Yea, their pre-eminence has not yet entirely ceased; they still constitute a privileged order among the nations of the earth. Their honors are in abeyance, indeed, at present, and even trampled in

the dust; but still they hold their patent of nobility in their hands, and the King of kings and God of nations who bestowed it, will in due time reinstate them in their privileges, in some way, which, though we cannot now anticipate it, will eventually be seen and read of all men, as glorious and divine.

What is said by Moses, in the text, of his countrymen the Jews, may be said with propriety by us, of the land in which we dwell. It in no way interferes with this, that miracles do not mark our history. To the eye of faith and devout reason, this makes no manner of difference: God's presence, and agency, and goodness may be most plainly displayed without them. He that believes that through God are all things, must realize the divine power and beneficence, in the medicine which cures diseases, as in a miracle of healing; or in the fruitfulness of the earth which crowns the year with plenty, as in the feeding of five thousand with a few loaves and fishes in the wilderness. If God works in miracles, he works in nature. If he is able to work miraculously, it is because he can work in the way we call natural. If he could not and did not do the latter, he could not and would not do the former. It is only our imbecility and dulness of spirit, that prevent us from seeing his hand as much in the growth of the lilies of the field, as in the raising of the dead. Were we of sound and quick apprehension in things divine, we should find God in the still small voice, as much as in the storm and earthquake.

Brethren, though God interposes no longer, at least for the present, in a miraculous manner in their affairs, he is, nevertheless, the God of nations as he ever was. He cannot cease, one moment, to be the God of nations, any more than he can cease to be the God of individuals.

He is often, indeed, a God that hideth himself; but it is only from those who enjoy not his revelation, or else who have no pleasure in searching him out and beholding his glory. He is often, also, in his infinite bounty, found of them that seek not after him: but much more of them who desire to trace his goodness towards them, and offer him the tribute of their gratitude and love. To such he shows himself, as their covenant God, as really and effectively as to the Jews of old. Be it ours, therefore, as a duty we owe to Him, to our country, and ourselves, and as an exercise not unsuitable to this our national anniversary, to recount, so far as time will allow, some of the *blessings* which distinguish our lot as a people, and then consider the *means* by which they may be perpetuated among us.

I am aware that we have been charged by foreigners with an overweening conceit of our advantages, and a proneness to indulge in boasting on account of them; and I am afraid there may be some ground for the accusation. Such a spirit should not be fostered or countenanced; it rather deserves severe rebuke. It often springs from sheer ignorance, which mistakes the facts of the case; and oftener from a criminal self-sufficiency which no facts will justify. In our ignorance we claim superiority where we do not possess it, and we overlook our advantages where they are most real and important; and in our vanity and pride, we indulge in a tone of gasconade, which, in the estimation of all intelligent and high-minded persons, is ridiculous and vulgar; while before God it is highly irreverent and impious. But we do not necessarily run into this error, when we set ourselves to estimate the lot which God has assigned us, and compare it with that of the other nations. There is a more excellent way, in which we would fain proceed

at the present time. We have nothing to boast of, though much to be thankful for.

1. (*a.*) Proceeding, then, in a spirit of humility and gratitude towards God, and of kindness and sympathy towards our fellow-men, to recount our national advantages, the first which presents itself is our geographical position. St. Paul, addressing the Athenians, tells them that "*God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and* THE BOUNDS OF THEIR HABITATION." How mercifully hath God fixed *our* bounds! Our location, considered only in a physical point of view, is a most favored one. I speak not of its extent, quite sufficient, as it is, to satisfy the largest desires of a reasonable and virtuous people: the wide, unbounded continent is all before us. Neither do I speak of the diversities of soil and surface which characterize our territorial domains; its fertility in producing everything valuable, which grows inside or outside the tropics; valleys which stand so thick with corn, that, to use the Psalmist's language, they "laugh and sing;" mountains which furnish every important mineral which men dig out of the earth; rivers unrivalled in extent and navigableness, to waft the produce of man's labor from one end of the land to the other for domestic exchange, or to the ocean for foreign commerce;—and all as beautiful to the eye as they are useful for the purposes of life. Neither do I dwell upon the security which keeps our borders. Unlike most of the nations of the earth, we need fear nothing from our neighbors. The Atlantic rolls between us and all real danger; so that nothing is left us to be apprehensive of, except ourselves. On these points I do not tarry: I only stop to hint, what advantage our geographical position gives us for fulfilling what seems to be our proper

destiny and province as a nation. Our calling as a nation, manifestly, is to try the experiment for the sister nations of the earth, whether fallen man is capable of self-government in any great degree. The experiment has been often tried before, but never with perfect and permanent success: generally, it has been a total failure. Look at the events of the last half dozen years. Within that time, half the nations of the Old World have risen against their constituted authorities, and wrested all power out of their hands—but only to give it back again, speedily and in larger measure, to some other authority, which has not had, it may be, even prescription to recommend it. The nations referred to have been acting over the fable of the dog and the shadow: grasping at more, they have lost all. Now one cause of the failure is, that they had not *room* enough to make the experiment successfully, and to qualify them to make it. Men crowded together, and hard pressed for occupation and for the necessaries of life, are seldom found characterized by that moderation and respect for others' rights, by which alone a weak government, that is, a republic, can ever stand. The citizens of Paris (and Paris is France), it is plain to see, would fain establish free institutions. Why do they not? Doubtless there are various causes which prevent it; but this we may safely say, that had they, as we have, territory all around them, which the unemployed and lawless might occupy and own, cultivate and enjoy, they might very possibly do it, even at the low point of intelligence and morality at which they stand. Never can we be sufficiently thankful that God has planted us on this continent, and that, having taken in hand to govern ourselves, we have had the mighty and efficient aid afforded by millions of unoccupied acres at our doors, highly fertile and easily

purchased. Perhaps but for this, the trial we are now making had long since failed, and we had now been suffering the dreadful evils which such a failure must needs entail; the hopes of the friends of freedom throughout the world utterly blasted by our discomfiture. I repeat it, therefore, that God has most mercifully "fixed the bounds of our habitation."

(*b.*) Observe again; what a *history* God has given us. It is brief, indeed, but most instructive. I do not say its pages are free from blots: would to God I could! but still, except in length, it will compare most advantageously with any the nations can present. St. Paul, speaking of his own countrymen as a people peculiarly favored of heaven, says, "*whose are the fathers.*" In recounting God's goodness towards us, may not we also point to the patriarchs of this nation? All of them men of enterprise, as emigrants and their descendants are wont to be, this trait of character in them was heightened to a heroic degree by the events of their lives and the circumstances of their lot. A high religious principle actuated many of them, and imparted that firmness, and steadiness, and moderation which were found so needful at the birth of the nation in the year seventeen hundred and seventy-six. They had brought with them, moreover, from across the Atlantic, or they had inherited from those who did, the most correct notions of civil government, that were then current among men; and these principles had been cherished and confirmed by their position on this continent, by their separation from the Old World, and by the manly virtues which their circumstances called for. Thus situated, they had fewer injurious prejudices than any people that ever lived. Their minds were left free, without casting off a due respect for antiquity, to examine and understand their true position,

and to adopt measures accordingly. They were wise without weakness; they were resolute without rashness; they innovated without fickleness; they revolutionized without Utopianism. Such, briefly, were the fathers of this nation, among them towering up one—once a stated worshipper in this consecrated building—who, though fully appreciated by few persons, and secretly disliked, it may be, by some selfish demagogues among us, commands the suffrages of the whole thinking and right-principled portion of the world, as the purest patriot that ever lived, and deservedly first—first without a rival—in the hearts of his countrymen. Here, then, is a legacy from our ancestors to this generation, for which we should be thankful to the God of nations. If history be philosophy teaching by example, what precepts, and what models are set before us, in even our brief national records!

(*c.*) The political *institutions* of our Union are another invaluable part of the legacy which they have left us. This, too, is the world's acknowledgment. As they acknowledge the virtue of the men, so do they the wisdom of their work. Such an inheritance cannot be too highly prized, in its proper place. It will not indeed of itself make a people prosperous and happy; it may even have an injurious tendency. Paper constitutions are a dead letter, and worse than a dead letter, when the intrinsic character of the people is not in harmony with them. An inferior constitution, which is the creature of unconscious growth and long-continued use, has far more power of self-preservation, and is a much greater blessing to a people, than the best-considered and most profoundly philosophical constitution, which finds no support in the people's "preparation of heart," to receive and enjoy it. Without this adaptedness, the most perfect written constitution is at the best but waste paper. So has it been emi-

nently and sadly proved, in the experience of the southern half of this continent. The South American republics have attempted to imitate us, when the model was altogether unsuitable to their case. The nations of Europe have shown a disposition to follow in the same foolish course. Mere imitation in such matters is a dangerous thing: it is apt to bring together incongruities, to wed forms and realities which have no common traits, or even sympathies. The founders of this republic, however, were not mere imitators; neither were they mere theorists and speculators, fancying that the ideal may be realized anywhere and under any circumstances. They were practical men of independent minds, who gave us a free constitution, not merely because such an one was pleasing to their imaginations, but because the state of society among them authorized and demanded it. Such a constitution, growing out of an actual state of things, and adapted to the character of the people, and withal liberal in its principles, and equitable in its spirit, is an incalculable blessing. It is not in such case a bone of contention—an occasion of revolution; it is a bond of union and a safeguard against change. It has a direct tendency to protect the people against despotism on the one hand, and anarchy, which is worse than despotism, on the other. It is as an anchor to the liberty, and therefore to the prosperity of the nation; though it should be remembered it will not hold the ship of state in every storm. She may part her cable, that is, renounce such constitution altogether; or she may drag her anchor, that is, retain her constitution in form and abandon it in spirit. This sad fact should not be forgotten; still, a constitution, originating as did ours, and handed down as it has been, is most honorable as a distinction, and

most priceless as a possession; and in the catalogue of our blessings should have a prominent place.

(*d.*) Having glanced at our political institutions in their theory, let us reflect a moment on our actual civil and political *condition*. And here I know not how to express my deep sense of our obligations to Heaven. Here the language of the text has strong applicability. Here, we may say, not in idle boasting, but in the humblest gratitude, "*what nation is there so great?*" The topic is boundless: I can only suggest a thought or two.

The happiness and prosperity of a people, as such, seem to depend, in very large measure, upon two things, the *amount* of the means of living possessed, and the *distribution* of these means. In almost every country, there are means enough in amount. Except in times of famine, which occur only at long intervals, and in a few countries, there is always, and everywhere, we may say, enough and to spare. The main point, therefore, is the distribution; and the great problem here is, so to distribute the means of enjoyment as will secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and yet not check the production of these means by regulations which fetter the industrial energies of man. It is easy to effect a perfectly equal distribution, at least for a moment: an agrarian law would speedily bring it about. On the other hand, it is equally easy to stimulate the energies of man, kindle his ingenuity, and cause him to bend his strength with life-long perseverance to the accomplishment of the ends of industry: you have only to leave him to follow the bent of his own mind, and to allow him to enjoy the full fruits of his labor. But it has not been found so easy to harmonize these opposites. Agrarianism is utterly incompatible with steady industry and a full development of the resources of society, and the energies of the

individual; it can only throw the world back into barbarism. And yet, at the same time it is equally clear that the accumulation of means is not necessarily the distribution of happiness. We sometimes see wealth on the increase, where the general comfort of the people is decreasing; an anomalous and melancholy state of things, which arises from privileged orders, laws of primogeniture, and entail, and the like.

Now, from these evils, thank Heaven, we are in a great measure exempt. With us, industry is untrammelled, the spontaneity of every man has free course, and labor meets its satisfying reward in the security of property against individual and social interference and aggression.

The consequence is, an amount of physical comfort for the masses which you find in no other land. If we have not so many very rich persons among us as are found elsewhere, neither have we so many very poor. There is indeed inequality among us: it is desirable there should be: without it, many of the faculties of man and many of the resources of society could not be developed. But let the inequality ever be that which springs from the ordinance of God, not the ordinance of man; let it be natural, not artificial. Let it be that which virtue and talent and industry occasion, and nothing beyond. An aristocracy of this kind we have, and I trust we always shall have. It is a good without any mixture of evil. While it causes some to abound, it no way lessens the number of those who have a decent competence, who stand midway between the extremes of poverty and riches: nay, it rather increases them. And while it increases them in number, it imparts to their mediocrity of lot a charm which it would be impossible to attain, if all stood on the dead level of a perfect equality. That

society is thus constituted among us, man's rights untouched, his energies untrammelled, and the laws of his individual and social nature left to their free and beneficent operation, just as God ordained; and that, as a consequence, almost universal competence, and scarcely any absolutely unavoidable want exist among us; that such is our condition, we never can be sufficiently thankful to Him who meteth out their portion to the nations. What though in other lands you see more splendid equipages, more magnificent dwellings, more princely domains: they only prepare the soul of the traveller to be so much the more shocked and harrowed by the abject poverty and fearful suffering which on all sides abound. Luxury and pride, veiling, perchance, their selfishness under the thin covering of taste for the fine arts, may quite willingly bear with the one for the sake of the other; with the misery, for the sake of the display; but not so the man who has learned in the school of Christ. To the Master, the many, the majority, "the multitude," are the chief object of interest: for these he specially labored, as for all he died; and he that has imbibed his spirit, will rejoice before God that he lives, if such be his lot, where the natural working of all the political institutions of the country is in harmony with the labors of this divine, all-comprehending benevolence.

Let me mention one other feature of our political condition, as compared with that of other nations. I mean, that there is so much of the civil, and so little of the military, in our system and our society. For this, also, God be thanked! When, in walking our streets, one meets a solitary constable, the thoughts suggested are not pleasant; though his guise be most pacific, and though we know that one-half of the efficiency of the force which he wields lies in that virtuous indignation of

the community against crime by which he is countenanced and sustained. The sight of such an official reminds us that, even in this favored land, with a free constitution and equal laws, where honest labor is almost sure to command the necessaries of life, there are persons virtually conspiring against our whole social system, upon which everything dear to man depends, and who are not to be restrained from the execution of their purpose, but by brute force, as brute beasts. And yet in this land a very small constabulary force suffices, perhaps one man in every two thousand. Not so is it, however, in the Old World. There the civil police is of necessity a very considerable force. But this is not all: nay, it is but a very small part of the evil I am speaking of. Strong as the constablery is, it is by no means sufficient for these governments to lean upon. Look at their standing armies. In the great cities of Europe, almost every fifth man you meet is a soldier. Uniforms seem the predominating dress in the streets. Swords and bayonets glitter everywhere. Morning, noon, and night, your ears are saluted by the military signals, and the music of the fife and drum and bugle. And what is the meaning of it all? Children may be tickled and delighted by such shows, and overgrown children—selfish men, who thereby accomplish their own selfish ends, may think it all very well; but men of reflection and religious principle cannot but mourn in bitterness over such a scene. Even though they may think such a state of things for the present unavoidable, they do not the less regard it as a tremendous evil. What, I ask again, is the meaning of it all? Does it not indicate that the very foundations of society are unstable, that peace is precarious, that property is insecure, that life is in peril? Does it not show, not only that the brotherhood of man is broken up, but

also the brotherhood of compatriotism and nationality? Does it not prove that mutual confidence, which is in such large degree the glory and happiness of the human race, is gone; and that things have fallen into an Ishmaelitish state, in which every man's hand is against his brother? Scanned with the eye of reason and religion, does not society, in such a state, really appear like some vast menagerie, where the savage beasts of greater power are kept from preying upon those of less, by the unblenching eye and iron rod of their keeper?

Such being the state of things abroad, when I call upon you, my brethren, on this memorable day, to be grateful to the God of nations, "*is there not a cause?*" What a contrast is presented to all this by these United States! Here, comparatively, there is none to hurt us or make us afraid. There is but little antagonism between the rulers and the ruled. The government and people are in amicable relations, as is citizen with citizen. They differ, it may be, about men and measures, but it is an honest and friendly difference. They never think of settling such differences by barricades and bayonets: they have a more peaceful way of adjusting their disputes. Force is not needed to put down the tremendous evils of sedition and rebellion, but only to punish private and individual wrong; and for this a very little physical force suffices. So may it ever be! May the time never come, when the mind of this people shall be familiarized to martial sights and martial sounds, and learn to look habitually upon a standing army as their protection against foreign or domestic—especially domestic wrong. When that takes place, our glory is departed. May a few unarmed constables ever be sufficient to preserve the public peace! May the chief security of each citizen ever be in the virtue and intelligence and consequent self-restraint

and moderation of his neighbors? Such should be our unceasing prayer; but that it may so be in all time to come, that we may ever exhibit this contrast with the other nations, while they continue in their present state, let us be truly thankful to God that it is so now.

(*d.*) I should like to speak at large, if time permitted, of our *social* condition, as distinguished from our civil and political, and as compared with that of other nations; for here, too, God has given us a decided superiority over most of them. I do not say over all, at least in all respects. And I should like especially to single out for remark the prominence given among us to the domestic relations; the tender sentiment which binds kindred together; the sweet associations which cluster round the family hearth; the pure type of character which is formed under a mother's loving care and a father's wise authority; and the unselfish intercourse of brothers and sisters. These things, my friends, are, after all, our richest treasures, and constitute a chief part of our glory, in the allowable sense of that word. There is not enough of these elements of true happiness among us; that most sacred institution of heaven, *the family*, is not duly prized, and cherished, and cultivated among us. But still we are not, in this particular, much, if at all, behind any of the nations, and most of them we largely surpass. But I must leave this topic, important and inviting as it is, simply remarking that, in the inventory of our blessings, this should ever stand conspicuous. Never can we be sufficiently thankful for our AMERICAN HOMES.

(*e.*) Once more, let us reflect a moment on our *religious and moral advantages* in regard to the *means of improvement* which we possess: the *actual improvement* which we have made of them must be left to every man's private and prayerful consideration. As regards means, what

nation is so blessed as we? What have we not, that we could reasonably desire? The two chief conditions—I might say all-comprehending conditions—of true spiritual good are ours. We have the *Bible*, the great moral lever for lifting up society. There are some among us, I am aware, who think otherwise; but they undervalue the instrument, because they desire not to do the work. What do they care about the *moral* elevation of society? And there are many more who, though they believe the Bible to be this powerful instrumentality, do not believe it with that profound and practical conviction which befits the subject. But theirs is not an error of judgment, but a perversity of will. Whether the Bible is rated too highly, when it is represented as thus potent, is a question of no difficult solution; it depends entirely upon that other question, whether it is a revelation from God. If it be so indeed—if God has come forth from the recesses of his unapproachable glory, and has spoken, as face to face, with man in that venerable book—then it is obvious there can be no exaggeration in the representations of its value and efficiency. Heaven cannot have thus interposed for nothing, or for any common or temporary purpose. The truths revealed must be vital; they must go deeper into man's nature, and follow man's interests farther, than any other. Comparatively speaking, the truths of science and art can only touch the surface, and affect the concerns of time; but those of revelation spread themselves over man's whole being and duration, and affect his mortal existence none the less, yea, rather the more, because they affect his immortal existence also, and primarily. This volume we have, thus stored with high spiritual truths; it is in free circulation among us; and our fathers have taught us to reverence and obey its contents. We have access, therefore, to

the greatest means of moral good. Let us remember that all the nations are not thus favored. The heathen know nothing of the book; and many Christian nations know it but by name. Among the latter, there are some who, holding this key of knowledge in their hands, studiously keep it from the people; and the consequences are manifest in the low state of true morality and religion among them. It is a matter calling for profound thankfulness to God, that we are not like them; that the first settlers of this land, and the founders of this republic, were almost entirely Protestants, and that, as such, their religion was the Bible; and that, in this particular, thus far, we have not departed from their ways. If the Bible be from God, it must needs be the chief and primary source of everything good among us—religious, moral, social, civil, and political.

I have hinted that we possess the two great conditions of national prosperity; and I have mentioned one of them—a knowledge of the *Bible*. The other is the possession of civil *liberty*. Liberty! how sweet the word. Rightly understood, not confounded with mere license, not regarded as the antagonist of law, but as at once the parent and the offspring of law, it is one of the most inestimable boons vouchsafed to man. But, if we are permitted to have any kind of freedom, by all means let it be *freedom to worship God*. By whatever trammels we may be restrained, let there be no obstacles to a free intercourse with our God, our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Judge. Let no created restraint be put upon us here. In our weakness, and ignorance, and varied sorrows, let us have free access to Him who is the final arbiter of our destiny. Let us be allowed to worship, according to the dictates of our conscience, the supreme power of the universe. Let us be permitted, without

the slightest let or hindrance, beyond what the very preservation of society absolutely requires, to love, and serve, and obey Him on whom our hopes of heaven depend, and who is the light and solace of our earthly pilgrimage. Such freedom is necessary, not only to man's present comfort, but to the highest dignity of his nature. If there be a sacred spot in his whole constitution, which the hand of a stranger should not touch, surely it must be that spot where the religious conscience dwells. Let God enter there and speak with authority, for it is his proper prerogative; but let not man intrude—man, or angel, or any other creature. When God enters there by his Spirit, and with his truth, it is to rectify, to sanctify, to elevate; but man's presence only perverts and debases; and, it may also be added, that the more man intrudes, the less of the Divine presence is vouchsafed; as though man's entrance had profaned the spot, and made it an unfit dwelling-place for God.

Brethren, this free access to the Divine communion, this freedom from human interference, we, through God's goodness, enjoy. Our institutions allow no man's right to dictate to us, much less to use violence with us. We may bow our knees in our closets, without the fear of being informed against, like Daniel, for thus worshipping the living God, and then cast to ferocious lions. We may assemble in an "upper room," without closing the doors to secure us against molestation, as in apostolic times. We may go up with the multitude to the consecrated temple in the full face of day, there speaking of God's goodness to the children of men, and singing aloud the praises of his glorious majesty; not hiding ourselves, as the primitive Christians often had to do, in "deserts, and dens, and caves of the earth," when they would unite in religious worship. And not only may every

man hold and avow Christian principles, but, knowing their worth by experience of their sanctifying and elevating influence, he is at liberty to go forth in the benevolent spirit which his religion has taught him, and seek to persuade others to become partakers of his joy. Freedom in these forms, the Christian counts more precious than rubies. He prizes it for his own sake; he prizes it for the sake of others. But thus rightly to appreciate the blessing, requires some reflection. Born in a land of liberty, and knowing life only in connection with its blessings, we need to be waked up to reflection in order to realize how vital it is in every regard, to our moral well-being. For the same reason, and because we have never witnessed persecution for religion's sake, we forget that it still exists to a great extent in the world, and is not merely a feature of bygone centuries; and so we may fail to exercise due gratitude to God for exempting us from that curse. We should distinctly remember that it is by no means yet banished from the earth. I speak not of the occasional murder of a missionary by the heathen whom he would instruct; nor of the more systematic persecution which Mohammedanism has so long carried on, so far as its weakness would allow it, against our holy religion. Far worse than either of these, I refer to the case of civilized and so-called Christian governments, which systematically, and by law, persecute their Christian subjects in the name of Christ himself. In what country where Romanism is predominant, is there freedom of religious worship? Scarcely one. The representatives of foreign courts, of the Protestant faith, are allowed to have private chaplains and build private chapels, perchance outside the walls of the capital city, but no more; and that only of constraint, not willingly. In Rome, the very heart of the papal

world, where the ecclesiastics are the civil officers, under the eye and hand of the Pope himself, this intolerance is most intense. The people are allowed to worship God, and understand the doctrines of Christianity in one form only—that dictated by their rulers! And when we would shame such a spirit and such a principle out of countenance, by a reference to the more liberal and Christian course pursued by this confederation, we are impudently told, by cardinals and archbishops, that it comes through the force of circumstances, not from choice; and that, if Protestants had the power in these United States, as Romanists have elsewhere, they would exercise it in the same way! In other words, not only do the Christians called Romanists persecute their brethren who differ from them in other lands, but leading men among them here and in England have presumed to advocate it as right in principle! Brethren, how inadequate all our acknowledgments to the Almighty, that we do not live under the power of these men, and have not been trained in their school and by their instructions; and that, with us and our countrymen, when we would determine the great questions touching religion, the only Being we are bound to consult is God—the only impulse to be followed, that of conscience—the only inquiry to be made, what is truth, and what does duty require!

I have singled out from the multitude of our blessings of a spiritual kind, these two, namely, the possession of the Bible, and freedom in the worship of God. I have done so, because they fitly go together: each leans upon the other, each protects the other, and they cannot long be separated. Christians are found who would restrict the liberties of their fellow-Christians, but it is without authority from the Bible. There we read, in their letter and spirit, the sentiments of the Master on the subject; in it he hath said: "*They that take the sword, shall perish*

by the sword." We read that when he sent forth his apostles, it was to preach not persecute, to persuade not force; and that he and they command men to search and see, and be fully persuaded in their own minds; applauding them when they do right, and rebuking them when they do not. Who can doubt that the Bible condemns all intolerance? An inspection of its pages proves that it does so; and we have the further proof, that when Christians, so called, begin to persecute, at the instance of their evil natures, they begin forthwith to push the Bible out of sight, lest it make their own hearts falter in their cruel work, and put courage into the hearts of their victims. Rome could not persecute if she freely used the Bible. On the other hand, religious liberty, where it is established, affords the Bible all that it asks and claims—*free course.* Let the Bible alone, leave it unfettered, and it will sufficiently commend itself to the intelligence, the heart, the conscience of mankind. Freedom is the atmosphere in which the Bible lives and thrives: the Bible is the agency by which that atmosphere is kept wholesome and pure. And while these two things are thus mutually sympathetic and helpful, and ought therefore to be thus associated together, they should be given great prominence among our national advantages, for, where they go, a long train of blessings follow. Where the Bible is used, the people cannot remain long without religious liberty, and having tasted of that, they will soon seek after civil liberty also; and when God has given them these, if they use them rightly, there is no other good thing which he will not add to them.

2. Thus have I endeavored, in harmony with the day, as our national anniversary, and yet I trust not out

of harmony with it, as a Sabbath of Divine appointment, to speak of the more prominent of the blessings which have fallen to our lot as a people. It remains, as was proposed, that I speak of the proper *means* for their *preservation*, and continuance among us. It is natural, that when we are counting our treasures, we should think of the possibility of losing them; when congratulating ourselves upon our present health, that we should have it suggested to our minds, that health and life are frail possessions. So, a prosperous and happy nation, on its natal day, may well consider the instability of all human things, and the necessity of using means to make the institutions which they value permanent. Let there be no croaking, no prognostications of evil; but let there be forethought and precaution. Men are usually very ready for the maxim, "in time of peace, prepare for war:" it is a far better rule, because wider and deeper in its import, "in time of freedom and prosperity, guard against a relapse into despotism and ruin." Thought and labor bestowed here, are not bestowed in vain. Do we for a moment suppose, that the blessings which we enjoy as a nation must necessarily perpetuate themselves? Or, acknowledging that they may be forfeited and lost, do we comfort ourselves with the thought that at least we of this generation are safe—that the evil will not come in our day? In the former case, we are fearfully in error; in the latter, if not mistaken, we are supremely selfish! Are not our politicians ever sounding in our ears, that "perpetual vigilance is the price of freedom?" This cry, I am fully aware, is often raised for party, not patriotic purposes—is employed, not to excite an intelligent caution and consideration, but a malignant suspicion, a groundless and pernicious jealousy of one class against another; yet, properly understood and applied, it is alto-

gether reasonable. Let there be vigilance; but let it be rightly directed, and rightly proportioned. It is vain for the soldier to be pertinaciously on his guard against the enemy at one point of the frontier or fortification, while he is really approaching at another; it is foolish in the sailor to be indignant that the upper works of the ship have been slightly damaged, and ignorant and careless that the very hull is rotting.

What, let me ask, do we suppose is going to give permanence to this government, and cause this day to be kept with felicitations and rejoicings for generations to come? What is to perpetuate this Union, and the many priceless blessings which flow from it? To attempt an answer to such an inquiry, in one word, would not be wise, and it would not admit of so brief a solution. Complex results demand complex causes for their explanation; and the result here is complex in the very highest degree. Not one man in a thousand adequately understands all the elements, and the working of all the elements, by which such a consummation as the preservation of a nation's liberties is to be reached. Far be it from me to pretend to any such knowledge. But still, any man may know—and it behoves every lover of his country, every parent anxious for the welfare of his children, to know—what are the principal causes on which we should depend. It is only the architect, or master workman, that thoroughly understands the various parts of a large and commodious, and highly-finished edifice; but any one may know that such a building has a foundation, and what that foundation ought to be.

On questions of this nature, men are prone to indulge in excessive simplification, and when inquiring after the causes of preservation or decay in the body politic, to fix on one part, or one ordering of the parts, as that

which is conservative of all the rest. One is smitten by the wise balancing occasioned by the separation of the legislative, judicial, and executive functions of the government. Another, by the principle of representation, as distinguished from the direct action of the people in their political concerns. A third thinks the ballot-box the palladium of our liberties. A fourth looks to the press as the sentinel on the castle walls, who warns of coming danger. A fifth to that fierce and fiery patriotism, which is fanned by most of our Fourth of July orations, by the booming of cannon, and by the music of the fife and drum. The enumeration might go on; I mention, however, but one thing more, and that is the diffusion, throughout the whole mass of the people, of a minute information about the doings of our government. Make us, it is said, a nation of well-informed politicians, and we shall be a nation of patriots and freemen. Now let it be granted, in conformity with the rule already laid down, that every one of these agencies has its efficiency and use, not excepting the fife and drum; and that some of these are of indispensable importance. However much or little, be it agreed that they all contribute something to the benign and permanent character of our institutions. Still, is it not manifest that even all of them combined are not enough? What man of reflection can fail to see that, even where not one of these is lacking, there must be still put in requisition something additional, which underlies them all, and aside from which they all are of small account. These after all are but superficial arrangements, outside expedients, palliative remedies; they do not enter into the depths of the subject; they do not reach the root of the disease. They do not take intimate hold of that which constitutes the material—the raw material, if you will—of govern-

ment; that from which government springs, and to meet the wants of which it is designed; I mean HUMAN NATURE. Even supposing most of the features and arrangements enumerated to have been contrived with an eye to human nature; after all, they do not enter into it with an ameliorating and transforming power. They are as the harness to the horse; but the temper of the animal they do not reach. With all these political regulations and expedients in perfection and full operation, a people may plunge headlong to their ruin.

Now, in discouragement of our efforts to find some more powerful and infallible means of guarding against such a result, it may be objected that nothing earthly is absolutely secure, that in human affairs it is vain to look for perfect stability. The truth of the solemn thought is freely acknowledged, nay, reverently maintained. All things in the universe are mutable but God. "*They shall perish*," says the Psalmist; "*but*," adds he, with his eyes directed heavenward, "*thou endurest; yea, all of them wax old as doth a garment; as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years have no end.*" This truth we do not forget; but surely it has no relevancy here, unless it is maintained that the use of *all* means is alike fruitless and impertinent, whether for the preservation of individual life, or civil liberty, or national existence. But who would maintain this? Man cannot be made immortal in this world, yet his days may be prolonged; and hence the use of food and medicine: and so nations and governments may be incapable of eternal youth; it may be they are doomed, by the very laws of nature, to have their infancy, their maturity, and their old age, in which last, dissolution is inevitable; still, short of this, nothing forbids that their existence admits of indefinite prolonga-

tion, and their freedom and prosperity also. Indeed, in this latter case we find no peremptory limit, analogous to the threescore years and ten in human life, of which the Psalmist speaks. At least we cannot give the average of endurance in the one case as in the other. We are encouraged, therefore, and bound to use, just as long as we are permitted, every means which promises to give permanence to our institutions.

But, as already hinted, the means which have been enumerated seem to fall short of the mark; they are not adequate to the effect desired, whatever may be the ordained extent or limitation of the life of human governments. Admitting, for the sake of argument, on the one hand, that no means whatever will be always infallible, and maintaining, on the other hand, that those mentioned are within certain limits valuable and vital, still, these are not the best and most potent that may be employed.

But before reference is made to any other, let the inquiry be, What is the ultimate source of danger to all equitable governments? Is it not, to say all in one word, *the depravity of man?* That man is depraved, and prone to transgress the laws of holiness and justice, is commonly considered and talked of as a doctrine of religion; but do we not know that it is just as certainly a fact presupposed in civil government, and, indeed, in all other government beneath the sun? It is this proclivity to evil that makes government necessary; at least in all those provisions and functions, the adjustment of which causes trouble and perplexity to men. For whom is all law, as penal, made, whether it be municipal or otherwise, but for the lawless and disobedient? Its great design plainly is to keep each such person from encroaching on his neighbor. Were every

one a perfect law unto himself, spontaneously keeping within the bounds of justice and equity, indulging no selfishness, but loving his neighbor as himself; government, if it existed at all, would be an essentially different thing from what it is. It is what it is, because we are not thus a law unto ourselves. We do not restrain ourselves, and therefore we have to be restrained from without, that is, by pains and penalties, by physical force. As regards the amount of physical force, it must vary with the varying conditions of society. It is proper it should thus vary. Although it is not always duly and exactly adjusted to them, yet the principle is manifest that it ought to be proportioned as nearly as possible to the character of the people. There is no abstract rule of right here, which should be applied to all cases alike. It is vain to suppose that children can be governed as adults are governed; that there should be one law to civilized and savage alike; or that among the civilized, an ignorant people, or a vicious people, can be safely treated as those that are intelligent and virtuous. Though they may all be brought, and should be brought, as soon as circumstances will allow, into that condition in which the least possible physical restraint will have to be laid upon them; yet, while in this process of improvement, while advancing towards this ideal state, they must be subject to coercion; considerable physical force must be put by the law into the hands of the magistrate, and authority be given to wield it. Man being depraved, and all his passions being in themselves lawless and unjust, if the ruling principle within is weak and inefficient, the ruling principle without must be made proportionately strong and controlling; and *vice versâ*, when the external control is small, the internal must be great, otherwise society must fall to pieces, and,

after a season of anarchy, readjust itself on some plan better adapted to its actual moral condition, its stage of moral progress.

Such are some of the abstract and general principles of the case. How stands the actual condition of things? What are the matters of fact existing among us? How are the anarchical elements of human nature kept in check under our government? What is the measure of physical force, of outward restraint, employed among us? I have already intimated, and it is known to us all, that, in this regard, we stand conspicuous among the nations of the earth. Some force is used; some force is indispensable. We must have judges and juries, sheriffs and constables, jails and penitentiaries. But, owing to causes which have been mentioned, the flagrant offenders against their neighbors' property, person, and character, are among us a small minority; and hence the amount of authority allowed to the government, and the amount of force wielded by it, are small—smaller far than, for so numerous a people, is witnessed anywhere upon the globe. Much power has not been granted, because much has not been needed. It has not been necessary that the external force be great, for the reason that the internal force has been considerable in itself, and aided by many accidental circumstances. Society has not needed to be governed much, because individuals have largely governed themselves. Brute force has not been put much in requisition, because moral power has sufficed.

In this statement we can read the conditions of our future destiny. In this statement we can see what is necessary to our preservation as a free and happy people, and what may prove our overthrow. Supposing the amount of external constraint to continue as it is; that is, in other words, supposing our government to continue

in its machinery as weak as it is (and it will never, in this regard, be strengthened, and *should* never be till the people, wearied out by anarchy, call for a more forceful and despotic form as the less of two evils); supposing, I say, the amount of constraint exercised upon us by the government to continue as it is; then, to our continued prosperity, it is absolutely necessary that the amount of inward restraint—that is, moral principle—in our population be not abated; and also that the favorable circumstances in which we are placed continue. If, in any way, the equipoise be destroyed, our ruin is inevitable; as when, in a ship, the amount of canvas displayed overmasters the ballast. Let our external circumstances be changed; for instance, let our territory be taken up so that none can possess themselves of a right in the soil but those who are possessed of very abundant means; then, unless this deficiency is supplied by an increase of the moral principle, we cannot stand. Or, on the other hand, suppose that, from a deterioration of our native population, or from the influx of a vicious foreign emigration, we should sink down from the high moral position which the first founders and citizens of this republic occupied: in this case, also, unless the loss is counterbalanced by a great increase in the favorableness of our circumstances, our ruin is inevitable. No strength of language is excessive here. From this law of social organization there is absolutely no escape; and it shows us plainly, therefore, whither our attention should be directed, and how we should work, if we would give stability to the political system under which it is our happiness to live.

In this moral calculation of our national destiny, it will be observed, the form and structure of our government have been supposed to remain unchanged. This

supposition is made, because it is universally admitted that they at least approximate to perfection, and that their continuance is necessary to the continuance of our liberties. The *variable* quantities in this calculation are, first, our outward circumstances—such as extent of territory, amount of unoccupied soil, density of population, and the like; and, secondly, the virtue of the people. Now, when we look into the future, and inquire what is likely to be our history hereafter in regard to these outward circumstances, we see clearly that they cannot become more favorable than they have been from the foundation of the government; nay, on the contrary, that they are most certain to become more unfavorable. Already, our Union has lost much of its compactness, and may lose it yet more; our population is not likely to be as homogeneous as it used to be; our cities will, many of them, become overgrown in size and depravity; foreign immigration, not always of the best kind, is fast increasing, not only from the Old World, as we call Europe, but from the oldest of all, as we may call Asia; and, lastly, wealth, which is often a source of evil to nations, as to individuals, is rapidly on the increase. When, therefore, with a wise forethought, we would look for proper means and appliances for preserving, to those who shall come after us, the advantages we enjoy, we need not look in that direction. If we depend upon any improvement in the mere external circumstances of our lot, or upon their continuance in the favorable state in which they have been, we depend upon a broken reed. Most of these advantages are temporary in their nature, and must soon disappear. They are naturally attendant upon a new people in a new country, but, with an increase in age and population, they pass away. In our case, how fast are they vanishing before our eyes!

The other *variable* element determining the stability of our free institutions, as already said, is the morality of the people. This, though mentioned here last, is not least; yea, it is the principal thing. Without a sound morality, all external circumstances, however favorable, are vain, with such a form of civil polity as ours. Only slightly restrained from without, as must need be the case in a real republic, and inadequately restrained from within, that is, by conscience, the bonds of society must be dissolved and revolution must ensue; and revolution with us can only be for the worse, never for the better. Morality, therefore, is absolutely essential in our system. Despotic governments may do without it, or, at least, without a large measure of it, because they have a sufficiency of brute force to keep things in order. Such governments rule men as men rule brute animals, by an appeal to their sense of mere bodily pleasure or pain, and not to their sense of the reasonable and the right; like the tyrants of ancient Rome, who controlled the people by the fear of conscription, or by the desire of shows and largesses. Moral suasion is employed but little, and depended on less. But our government rests, and thank God, has thus far rested securely, on the moral sense of the community, almost exclusively. The principle of virtue has had its sacred and indispensable office to discharge, and it has done it adequately, though not in all particulars, as could have been desired. In this its momentous function, it has been seconded and aided by many things of an accidental nature; but these subsidiary agencies, as already said, cannot long continue. In a few years more, the morality of the people, instead of being aided and supplemented by such things, will have many positive hindrances and obstacles to contend with. The public virtue, single-handed and against

great odds, will have to sustain the complicated and precious interests of the public weal—the Commonwealth.

We see, then, the conclusion at which we have aimed. Valuing our existing institutions above all earthly good, and beating round to find somewhat which will give them vitality and permanence, we are shut up to the conviction that nothing will do it, but moral principle in the people. Other things are helpful, but this is indispensable; and this, proportionately increased, will supply the lack of all other things, when they are withdrawn; but nothing will supply the lack of it. Such is the conclusion.

But perhaps you will be disposed to regard this as a rather tame and secular conclusion for a minister of religion to reach, alien from the spirit of this holy Sabbath, and uncongenial to the sacredness of this place; and I confess it would be so, if I should stop here. But, though this is properly called a conclusion, for morality in the people bears directly and immediately on the administration of government; yet back of it there are other and higher conclusions, short of which we cannot stop. The question may still be fairly asked, what is to support morality? is there any instrumentality or agency which can be brought to bear for the maintenance and increase of public virtue? With an answer to this question, doubtless, we are all ready: *the Christian religion in its purity—Bible Christianity.* I say Bible Christianity, for this alone will fully meet the exigency, will furnish the morality which free institutions call for. Yes, our government must sustain itself on the morality of the people, and that morality on true Christianity. So thought the father of his country. In his "Farewell Address," he distinctly warns the people of the United States against supposing that morality can be preserved

without religion. Since his removal from among us, the large experience of the world has further confirmed the position. We see this in the writings of such men as De Tocqueville and Chevalier, as it was seen in their countryman Montesquieu, a hundred years before. With the first and last of these political philosophers, many of us are familiar. I quote only the words of M. Chevalier. Some of his language is this: "The good state of morals in America has its origin in religious faith. As long as Americans shall preserve the severity of their moral conduct, they will preserve the democratic republic. If their morals become relaxed, if they become vicious, it will be because religion has been deprived of its authority." But why quote authorities? In truth, his is a very shallow, or a fearfully biased and blinded mind, which does not see this truth, written as with a sunbeam in the whole history of man, and in the very nature of things.

Landed in this conclusion, we would seem to have reached the very summit; and in one view it is even so. In the *sphere of instrumentalities*, at least, we can ascend no higher. Above all political contrivances and arrangements, we have put morality; and above morality, and as its only adequate source, we have put genuine Christianity: beyond this, there is nothing which we can make use of and *apply directly* to the minds of our countrymen, to keep them in that state in which they will be at once anxious and able to preserve our free institutions. And yet out of and beyond this sphere we may go, in our endeavors to give perpetuity to the republic. We not only may, but should. It is not enough that sound morals be inculcated, nor that they be founded on Christianity as their only adequate basis. Though these, taken together with the other measures which have been named,

exhaust the direct means toward the ends which true patriots aim at; there still remains a mighty agency, which we may indirectly bring to bear, and which is indispensable to the success of all the rest. Till we have proceeded to this point, and put this agency, if I may venture the word, in requisition, we are illogical in our reasonings, and unpatriotic and undevout in our feelings. After all means have been provided and employed, we are not sure of their success. There is a Power above us, which may prosper or frustrate them all, as He sees fit. After laws have been wisely enacted, and morals have been soundly taught, and doctrine scripturally inculcated, God's smile and blessing must be unceasingly invoked. After the wood has been prepared, and the victim slain, and the sacrifice made ready in every way, fire must be called down from heaven. All things ultimately rest upon the sovereign will of God—the welfare of nations, as the welfare of individuals; and when, therefore, we have faithfully employed other means and opportunities, such as human sagacity and integrity may apply for the securing of our prosperity, it still remains that we come as a nation to the footstool of mercy, and humbly ask the Divine care and benediction. When we have done this, we have done all that can be done: human agency and skill, and volition, must step aside: "*The Lord reigneth;*" and he alone.

Nor should we experience the slightest fear or sadness at having thus reached the limit of our powers, and that we are, thenceforth, in absolute passivity, in the hands of God. Just the reverse. In this state are true hope and peace. When we have attained this feeling, we have laid hold on the golden chain let down from heaven. "*The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.*" Oh, how happy would it be, if the people of these United States were found

this day, as one man, in the practice of pure Christian morality, and in this state of devotional and entire dependence on the God of nations! To him who witnessed the spectacle, the calculation of our national horoscope would be easy, and full of confidence and joy. So long as such a spirit prevailed among the people, he would as soon look to see the pillars of heaven shaken, as the fabric of our liberties overthrown. He would expect the end of our history to be the consummation of all things.

I have done. In principle, he is the best patriot who is the best Christian. He is the best preserver and propagator of free institutions, who exhibits himself an honest, just, benevolent, beneficent, active, devout, and in every way consistent, follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. In proportion as such characters are multiplied in society, and their influence is felt, have we reason to hope that our descendants in distant ages will rejoice over the varied blessings of civil and religious liberty, faithfully transmitted to them; and will, on the recurrence of this anniversary, say one to another, as we do to-day, "*What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is, in all things that we call upon him for?*"